

Days of Confinement



F/O BRUCE COWIE
#5169 - STALAG LUFT I,
BARTH, POMERANIA,
GERMANY.



Background and Diary notes
of
Flight Lieutenant Bruce Cowie
R.N.Z.A.F. NZ417029

P.O.W Stalag Luft I
June 1944 to May 1945

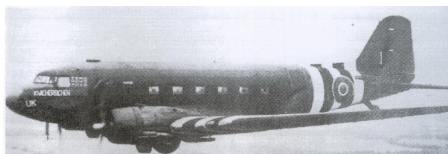
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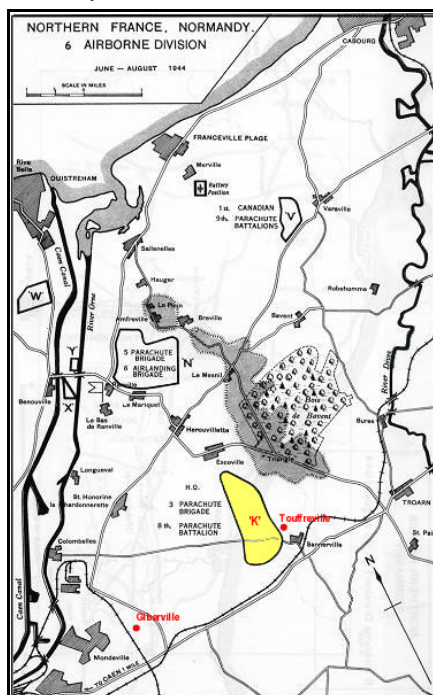
June 5th 1944

At 2250 hours on June the 5th 1944, C-47 Dakota KG-424 of 233 Squadron took off from *Blakehill farm* (NW of *Swindon Wiltshire*) and with others of its type headed for *France* via *Littlehampton*.



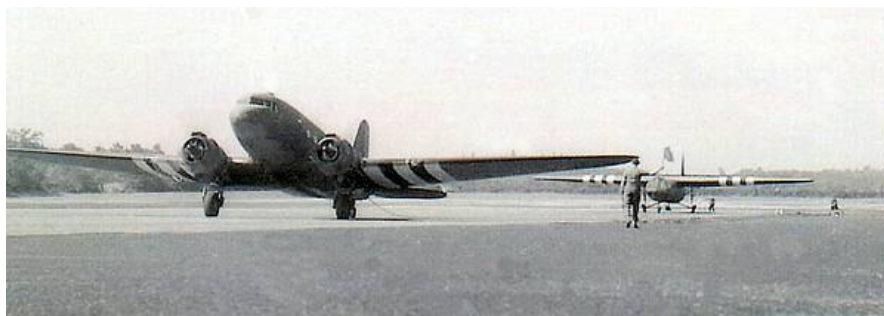
C47 Dakota III FZ692 of 233 Squadron
FO Bruce Cowie trained in this aircraft on 28th April 44

Piloted by Wing Commander Morrison (Officer commanding 233 squadron) and navigated by Flying Officer Bruce Cowie R.N.Z.A.F. it was the lead aircraft of six towing Horsa gliders of 'F' Squadron, the Glider Parachute Regiment. Five gliders contained jeeps and trailers (loaded with TNT for blowing up bridges over the *River Dives*), plus two motorcycles, the 6th being no 2 Section of 224 Parachute Field Ambulance. At final briefing 233 Squadron was reminded that DZ 'K' to which they would fly was the furthest inland.



6th Airborne Drop Zones for D Day

Twenty four other C-47 Dakota's followed with paratroops of the 8th Parachute Battalion (3 Parachute Brigade) of the British 6th Airborne Division. They headed for Drop Zone 'K' close to Touffreville, north east of *Caen*. Their mission was to blow up the bridges over the *River Dives* at *Troan* and *Bures* to impede the progress of German rein-



C47 Dakota with Horsa Glider at Blakehill Farm

forcements. Operation Overlord, the invasion of Europe was commencing. This was the start - the invasion of France by the Allies.

At 0047 hours on June 6th, 1944, on what would later be known as D-day, C-47 Dakota KG-424 released its Horsa Glider (Chalk No 218) piloted by Lt A. E. Pickwood and Sgt M. Watts.



Flying Officer Bruce Cowie RNZAF

On arrival in the area of LZ 'K' the 6 'F' Sqn gliders found it obscured by low cloud and the smoke of war and only the two gliders flown by Lt Pickwood (cn 218) Sgt Banks (cn 220) managed to land on the correct LZ. This was primarily because the Eureka beacon had been incorrectly placed on LZ. The area had been bombed by 100 Lancaster's prior to release of the gliders and the Airborne troops. There was a lot of *flak* and tracer reported as being between the aircraft and glider.

Three hours and forty minutes after take off, C-47 Dakota KG-424 landed back at Blakehill farm. Three aircraft did not return, two were hit but serviceable. One paratrooper was killed by *flak*.

June 6th 1944

On the following night, at 2220 hrs, 21 aircraft on Operation '*Rob Roy One*' set off on from Blakehill Farm on the first re-supply run to drop 371 panniers on DZ 'N' in the *Caen* area, for the 6th Airborne Division.

The panniers contained ammunition, fuel, radio sets and provisions.

Approaching the French coast at the mouth of the *River Orne*, intense light *flak* from Allied naval vessels damaged two of the aircraft which were forced to return to base. The two lead aircraft went down in flames. One of these was KG-424 crewed by Sqn Ldr C. Wright AFC, RAF (pilot), Fg Off E.Q. Semple RCAF (2d pilot), Fg Off B. Cowie R.N. Z.A.F (nav) and Fg Off C. J. Williams RAF (WOP).

The aircraft turned to starboard and went down in a controlled dive with smoke coming from the engines finally crashing with starboard engine and wing on fire by Giberville at 2355 hrs. The Captain (Sqn Ldr C. Wright AFC, RAF), Navigator (Fg Off B. Cowie R. N.Z.A.F) and Despatcher ("Lofty" Alexander) because of injuries remained close to the aircraft and were sheltered under hedges by the French Resistance. In the afternoon, more than twelve hours later they were captured by the Germans to become POWs.

The 2nd Pilot (FO Semple), WOP (FO Williams) together with Despatchers, Cpl Owens RASC, Ackley RASC and Allen RASC, evaded capture by the Germans and assisted by the French Underground remained as evaders until the night of June 28/29 1944 when FO

Semple and FO Williams with the help of a French guide reached British lines and returned to their squadron on 3rd July.

Details at this time are not detailed, but the following is a transcript of the War diary kept by F/O Cowie during his 11 months as prisoner of war. FO Bruce Cowie suffered bad burns to his face and hands as a consequence of the crash landing.

"FOR YOU ZE WAR ISS OFER"

And the war is really over!

*When your target's past, when once more at last, you alter course for Dover,
You get a surprise when you realise - For you ze war iss ofer.*

*When that harmless (?) flak breaks your aircraft's back, - no longer a skyway rover -
The plane well alight goes down in the night - For you ze war iss ofer.*

*When with fierce impact, you make rough contact, to land on fresh German clover,
You feel with dismay that from this very day - For you ze war iss ofer.*

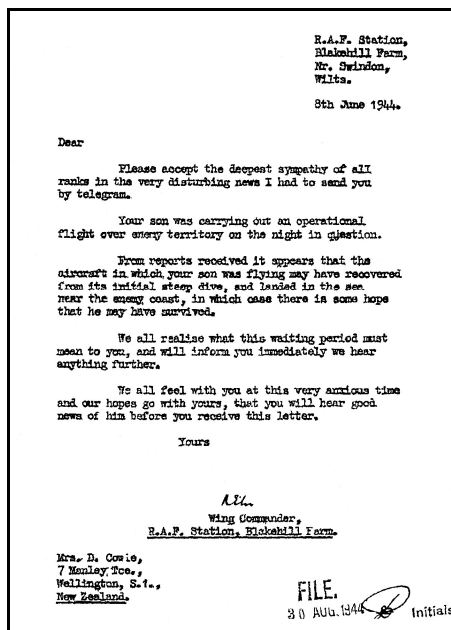
*From the blazing mess, by God not by guess, you emerge and look for cover,
But "hanz up" you hear, and begin to fear - For you ze war iss ofer.*

*As you face the Hun with his well aimed gun, while his comrades sagely hover,
Around, they'll say, in their guttural way - For you ze war iss ofer.*

7th June 1944

S./Ldr Wright, "Lofty" R.A.S.C., and myself were captured in the afternoon and taken in an open armoured vehicle to a German position in some woods a few miles away. Allied fighters were constantly overhead but seemingly confined their activities to reconnaissance. On arrival "Wilbur" and myself were bandaged by Wehrmacht medical orderlies. After a nasty scene with a senior German officer who did not appear to love the R.A.F., we joined a number of British paratroopers and left by truck - round 5pm. Several miles further on we stopped and were interrogated outside a big country house before moving on to St-Pierre-Sur-Dives, where we arrived late at night. We were kept in an old school - jammed in on the floor like sardines. Rather disturbed night.

We left again on the morning of the 9th and passed through Fleures in the afternoon soon after bombers had visited it. Late at night we reached RENNES and the wounded were put in hospital, none of us having much sleep due to a R.A.F. raid.



Letter Received by Family in N.Z.

10th June.

Dressings removed from face and hands - mercurochrome painted on.

19th June.

S./Ldr Wright O.K. and left for Stalag the other day. The hospital filling up rapidly, mostly Americans. The trucks bringing in prisoners are constantly being strafed; 9 survived in one truck; another lot of 165 men - 43 reached here. The R.A.F. visit here most nights and every fine day there are raids, the most frequent being P-47 raids in the evenings. In one day-raid bombs fell on both sides of the hospital and we had pieces of shrapnel through the windows. Face almost healed and hands improving.



View from Hospital at Rennes-Gestapo H/Q on left

21st June.

Till now food has been little soup twice a day - quantity now improving.

28th. June

R.A.F. B./A. [Bomb Aimer] From raid morning 7th arrived. The French had him in hospital as civilian but Ger-

mans moved him in error, leaving some Canadian soldier instead. (CAEN). The two French nurses in our ward are Jeannette Lesquer and Jacqueline, very fine girls.

In front of the hospital is the Gestapo Headquarters. Patriots and confiscated radio sets are often seen being taken in.

6th July.

Four men wounded by a H.A. shell in the Stalag were brought in last night. There are many French North African troops here brought over from the Stalag each day to construct slit trenches in the compound. They are very friendly. There are also a few Russians and two Indians captured at Tobruk.

AIR FORCE CASUALTIES	
To include New Zealand personnel serving overseas have been reported as casualties:-	
KILLED ON ACTIVE SERVICE.	
WESTON, Flight Sergeant, Arthur R. Mrs. E. M. Weston, 8 Cameron Road, Tauranga (m.).	
MISSING, BELIEVED KILLED IN ACTION.	
BOYCE, Pilot Officer, Trevor W. Mr. M. C. Boyce, 8 Victoria Street, Hawera (f.).	
BRIGHAM, Flight Sergeant, Jack McC. Mrs. C. Brigham, 40 Pompanner Terrace, Ponsonby, Auckland (m.).	
McLEAN, Flight Sergeant, James J. Mrs. J. J. McLean, 1 Rauranga Avenue, Epsom, Auckland (w.).	
MISSING ON AIR OPERATIONS.	
BARTON, Warrant Officer, Bruce G. Mrs. M. Barton, 16 Wilton Street, Grey Lynn, Auckland (m.).	
CHALMERS, Pilot Officer, James C. Mr. A. Chalmers, 84 Margaret Street, Invercargill (f.).	
Clouston, Flight Lieutenant, John G. Mr. A. Clouston, 337 Whaka Road, Rotorua (f.). Mrs. J. R. Clouston, 27 Bolton Street, Lavenham, Suffolk, Suffolk (w.).	
COWIE, Flying Officer, Bruce. Mrs. D. Cowie, 7 Manley Terrace, Wellington (m.).	
DAVIDSON, Flying Officer, Lancelot V. Mrs. M. Davidson, 8 Ossian Road, Napier (w.).	
DONAGHY, Flight Sergeant, Thomas R. Mrs. J. B. Donaghy, 80 Koromiko Road, Wanganui (w.).	
DUNCAN, Sergeant, Wallace G. Mrs. I. H. Evans, 63 Esplanade Road, North Beach, Christchurch (s.).	

Casualty List - 28th July 1944

8th July.

Found another R.A.S.C. chap [Despatcher Ackley] from our kite in ward upstairs with busted arm. Another of men [Despatcher Allen] caught with him. Says he thinks Cliff and Semp may have got back to British lines.

9th July.

Following the R.A.F. last night Bostons were over this morning and one came down very close - also Mustang.

12th July.

Left hospital - marched to Stalag other side of town. Rennes is a fine town, with some beautiful buildings and a river running thru the centre. Gen-darmes stood to attention and saluted,

French civilians smiled and waved as we marched, testifying to the French sentiments at our invasion.

24th July.

All airborne troop and aircrew moved from Stalag in evening. Dennis

1.76/2 12/38/1 STALAG		OFFY
LONDON JD 1640 KETTERAL WELLINGTON		
HED 240 BERLIN CARLES AIRMAN 422281 GREIG CAPTURED 29/7 411857 CAMPBELL		
CAPTURED 12/8 404460 FLEMING CAPTURED 13/8 417029 OOWIE CAPTURED NO		
DATE GIVEN STOP 42324 GILLAN DEAD 21/7 42373 COOKE DEAD 24/6 COVERS SIX		
NAMES. GORDON.		

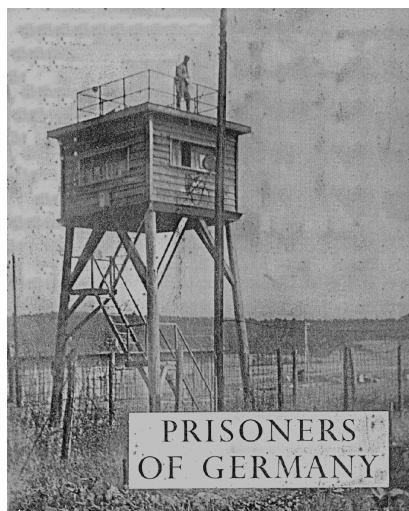
STALAG 221 RENNES FRANCE

12.7.44 - 24.7.44

Here at last we received sufficient food. This great factor well offset the disadvantages. Three meals per day. Haircut. Hot shower every week.

German officers were sometimes round inspecting our billets with whom the prisoners often had long conversations, even arguments.

P-47's over every evening dive-bombing nearby targets, sometimes beating up Stalag. On the 17th two waves of medium bombers attacked the railway station close by the camp, round noon, tracking overhead. One aircraft down in each wave, the station was left smoking heavily for hours. Dennis Trudeau and I managed to correspond with some French people per medium of the French native troops who are allowed out. We received gifts of playing cards, eggs etc.



Me 109's have been moved in to the local aerodrome and receive some attention from allied planes.

Trudeau the Canadian paratrooper remained. 36 of us left altogether - among the number - Capt John Walker (Glider pilot [cn 102] R.A.F.) Lt Smith A/B. R. A.C.; Coburn Arlidge U.S.A.A.F., P-47 pilot from Kavama.

25th July.

We arrived at LE MANS in the morning. An interesting sight in the middle of town was the Post Office, blown open a few hours before, apparently. We started out of LE MANS in the early afternoon. Just outside the town the bus (an English one with signs in English still in it) pulled into a wood off the road when an air-raid started.

The French civilians soon discovered our presence and dozens of them arrived bringing us fresh French bread etc which the Austrian guards permitted them to give us.

We moved on after a few hours. The long straight roads were lined with strafed, burnt-out vehicles. Allied fighters were seen fairly often. One P-47 came down at us as we were pulling out of a village but did not open fire. Late at night we came into the town of Chartres and saw a terrific red explosion and fire near the centre of the town.

In the Stalag there we spent the night in a large barn with hundreds of British troops, mostly from the Welsh Fusiliers. In the morning the aircrew were separated from the rest and I met Ron Cuthbert and two of his crew.

In the afternoon we moved again, being taken to the chapel of a Catholic school, where we slept on straw for a few days. Most of the men here were P-47 pilots. There was an organ in the chapel and often a German guard would play it; the popular "Lili Marlene" being much requested.

LILI MARLENE

*Vor der Kaserne, vor dem grossen tot
Steht eine laterne und steht sie doch da?it*

*Und wollen wir uns die wiedersehen
Bei der laterne wollen wir stehen
Wie einst Lili Marlene, wie einst Lili Marlene.*

*Unser beide schatten, soh wie eins aus
Das wir so liebt uns hatten
Das sah man gleich das aus*

*Und wollen wir uns da wiedersehen
Bei der Laterne wollen wir stehen
Wie einst Lili Marlene, wie einst Lili Marlene.*

*Schon lief der posten, sie blissen
zupfenstreich*

Es nam drei tage roster....

*Und wollen wir uns die wiedersehen
Bier der laterne, woleen wir stehen
Wie einst lili Marlene, wie einst Lili Marlene*

CHARTRES

26.7.44 - 31.7.44

We sometimes got out under guard to fetch food from the German barracks down the road.

A number of P-47's attacked the nearby railway bridge one evening diving right by our chapel and causing some excitement. The cheering stopped when a German Sgt rushed in and drew a gun on Jack Ross.

In the evenings we were given an hour to exercise in the courtyard and get away from the flies.

31st July.

We left about 4.30am for Paris. Once more we saw roads littered with strafed vehicles - some still burning. We arrived in Paris round 7am.

We passed right through Paris - a very lovely city - and had several glimpses of the Seine. The only bomb damage we saw was round the railways.

We stayed in a room in a railway station all day and the whole party of us had dysentery which stayed with us two or three days en route to Frankfurt.

We left Paris that night by train via Metz for FRANKFURT where we ar-

lines O.K. and then to England. King, who was attached to us at D Day came down at Arnheim.

4th August, 1944

Very good camp after conditions of last two months - shower - clothes - Red Cross parcels - good food. Met F/Sgt Jim Brady working in clothing store (engaged to Margaret Brinane, Berhampore)



Dulagluft Wetzlar—Interrogation Transit Camp

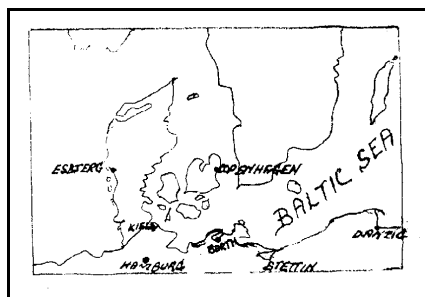
5th August.

Left Wetzlar. We spent one night in Berlin marshalling yards. Passed through Stettin.

8th August, 1944

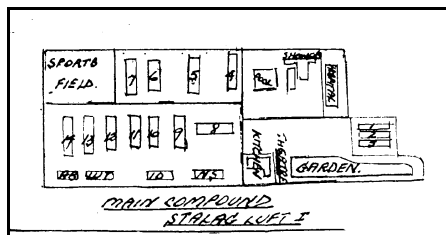
STALAG LUFT I, BARTH,
POMERANIA, GERMANY

Accommodated in tents for sleeping, but eating in permanent blocks. Thanks to Red Cross parcels, ate quite well. The weather in August was very sunny and we got great tans through sunbathing. Occasional visits from U.S.A.A.F. bombing Rostock, Stettin etc.



Location of Stalag Luft I at Barth

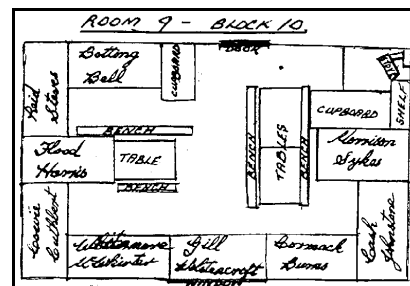
In the summer, swimming parties were permitted in a neighbouring inlet. On 13.9.44 we moved into Barrack 10 from the tents - a welcome change! Harry King arrived in October (271 Sqdn) and informed me that Cliff Williams and Semp got back to British



Main (West) Compound Stalag Luft I

ODDS AND ENDS

From December 1943 on - Stalag Luft I had a news service, unknown to the Germans - the B.B.C. News. Every day each block received the latest news from London on a typewritten sheet - read with great caution. Only today, May 1st, 1945, did we learn, after the Germans handed over the camp, how this service had been possible. A unique radio-receiver made from the oddest materials and junk was made and so hidden that even the most thorough of the German searches failed to discover its whereabouts.



Room 9 Block 10

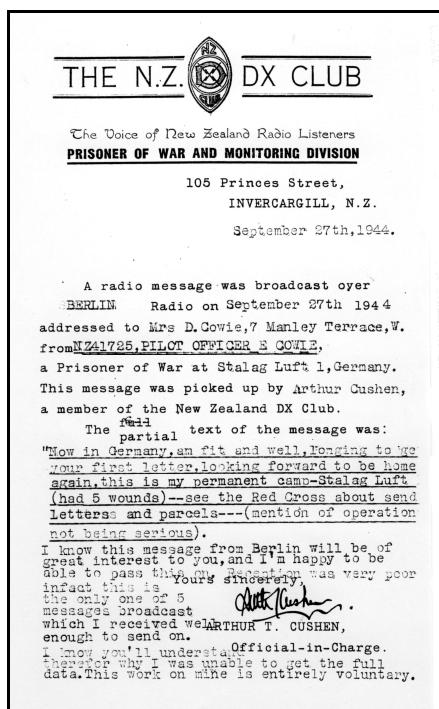
We had little to do. In our block, we had 18 men in each room, and every room did its own cooking etc. So every man had K.P. duties every nine days. This and washing clothes were about all we did for work. When we had lights in the evenings, "bridge" was popular, but most of the time went in reading. We should all have been at a great loss, without our little library.



Sportsfield and Accommodation at Stalag Luft I

XMAS and NEW YEAR (1944-45)
were two quite happy days thanks to the
arrival of some American Red Cross
Xmas parcels - enough for an issue of
3/4 per man.

These wonderful parcels contained: Tins processed butter and cheese, jam, cherries, Xmas pudding, dates, "Oxo" cubes, tea, turkey, minced ham, sausages, fruit bars, mixed candies, nuts, chewing gum, games, playing cards,

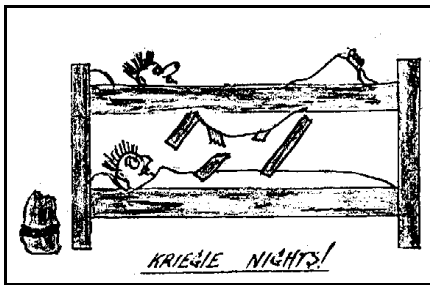


First advice of Prison Camp Details

The news from German communiques and prisoners' comments was also issued daily. One of these spots is opposite.

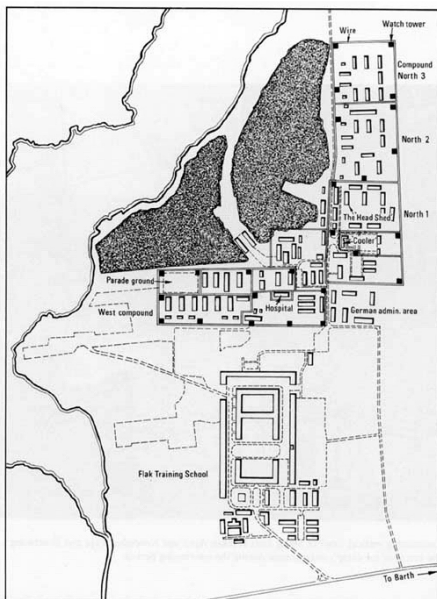
Red Cross parcels at first arrived regularly but became more and more scarce as the war increased the Germans' difficulties in transportation. By 1945, par-

pipe and tobacco, cigarettes. This luxurious fare made all the difference to a P.O.W. Xmas.



At the end of March, 1945, the food situation improved again. First - more potatoes arrived on camp and were soon followed by Red Cross parcels. In the evenings, the Germans once again gave us lights in the barracks for an hour or so.

A Flak school was located beside the camp. It was a large red brick building. Outside it was all the radar equipment for detecting a/c on which the German service-men and women would be busily occupied in fair weather.



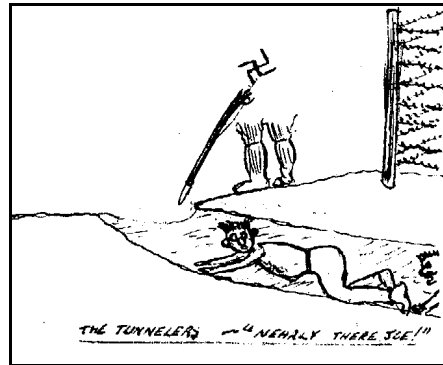
Layout of Stalag Luft I in 1945

At irregular intervals searches would be made of the barracks for signs of preparations for escape. The searches were usually thorough, and usually necessitated the occupants of the barrack to spend several hours outside.

Many tunnels were constructed by prisoners but all were discovered before use.

By the Flak school was a belt of pine trees and beyond this was an airport used for training.

Arados from it were often beating up the camp or dog-fighting above in good weather. Two collided overhead in Autumn, one pilot bailing out; the other got "the chop".



The Tunnelers - "Nearly There See!!"

In April Junkers 88's were based there for operations against the Russians, another landing strip was reputed to be North of the camp.

As the Russians came nearer the FW 190's worked from the drome. On April 30 the drome was evacuated - mines being laid.



Junkers Ju 88 abandoned on Airfield

Many changes occurred with our compound's personnel. E.g. Block 11, when we arrived, was occupied by U.S.A.A. F. officers. These moved to the North Compound and British aircrew took their place. They in turn had to move amongst the other British blocks when a camp East of Stettin was evacuated and the U.S.A.A.F. N.C.O's from there arrived.

In March, the N.C.O's also moved to the North compound, and new British P.O.W's and British Army personnel captured at Dunkirk and lately evacuated from Danzig took possession of the block. Most of these men were suffering from frostbite.

In 1945 many changes occurred. The Luftwaffe handed over the camp administration to the Wehrmacht. Volkss-

turn took over guard duties from the slightly younger Luftwaffe personnel, who were sent off to the East Front. ("Henry" being one of the last to go.) The girls from the flak-school all went to defend Berlin. The radar equipment outside was dismantled.



Flak School from Guard Tower

The German officer who first used to take roll-calls was Captain von Beck. He was a real gentleman and really liked by all prisoners.

During the air-raids we were supposed to remain in the barracks. In August when Mustangs shot up the drome P O W's cheered outside. Shots were fired - no-one hurt - one bullet in Col. Malstrom's bed. In early March 1945 there was another shooting episode.



On March 18, during an air-raid, Lt Whitehouse (S.A.) BL1 was hit in the body. A bullet ended on the wall beside me as I lay on my bed. 2nd Lt E.F. Wyman (BL 2, U.S.A.A.F.) Was killed.

THE END

The final great Soviet offensive began on April 15, 1945. From Gorlitz in the south, right up the Oder to Stettin, the front flared up. On the morning of the 20th at Barth, we could hear the terrific artillery barrage of the Red Army establishing bridge-heads over the Oder.

News: 28.4.45

Today streams refugees seen leaving area. Demolitions in afternoon and night. Germans at last allowed trenches to be dug outside in case strafing; we had already dug holes under the floors of our rooms in secret.

1st May 1945

Germans handed over camp and all but few left at 2am. Today Russians took Stralsund and two of our senior officers met them near there, bringing Lt. another back. News tonight - **Hitler dead!**

Russian, U.S.A., R.A.F., flags fly together over camp.

Concentration camps were found near the airport with ghastly conditions obtaining there. Their existence had been kept a strict secret and was unsuspected by the German civilians and our own guards.

After Liberation

	Name:	COWIE
	Vorname:	Bruce
	Dienstgrad:	2/O
	Erk.-Marke:	5169
	Serv.-Nr.:	NZ 417 029
Nationalität:		Neuseeländer
Baracke: 40		
Raum: 8		

Index Card taken from German Records

OPERATION REVIVAL

Although the actual liberation was performed by the Russians, negotiations to obtain their release at high levels were not going smoothly. When discussions reached a frustration level, the decision was made by Eisenhower to fly in and rescue the allied POWs

This was the start of OPERATION REVIVAL. .



Guard Duty with Russians—Stalag Luft I

It took several days, until 12 May 1945, before "Operation Revival" started. Headed by Brigade General William Gross, Commanding Officer of the 1st Air Division of the 8th US Air Force, his aircrews were told by the briefing officer that they had one more mission to fulfil. The mission would be to fly into North eastern Germany to rescue Allied POW airmen from Stalag Luft 1. The Russians had liberated the camp but seemed to be hesitant about releasing the Allied POW airmen. They were not being at all cooperative with their Western Allies.



B17 Loading Ex POW's at Barth

The briefing officer told them that they would be flying into an airstrip at Barth airdrome just south of the Baltic Sea. (a few miles from Stalag Luft 1) to rescue as many as possible American and British POWs from a prison camp deep in the Russian-occupied territory north of Berlin. There was serious concern that these men were to be marched off to Russia.

There they would load the POW's aboard the B-17s and fly them to the Bordeaux area of France (for Americans where they would be put on ships and sent back to the U.S.A) or to England if they were British.

"The name of this operation is 'Revival,' he advised. "The Russians don't seem to want to co-operate in releasing our allied airmen POWs so we're going in and getting them. If the Russian's don't like what we're doing," the briefing officer went on, "Then it's just-Tough Shit."

There was applause from the assembled aircrew

The B-17s were modified to hold up to three dozen passengers. The bomb bay was covered with a wooden floor, and all guns and turrets had been removed. At Barth, the aircraft would land pick up 25 to 30 passengers and be back in

the air in 11 minutes." A total of 7,717 Americans and 1,427 British POWs were flown out.



B17's being Loaded with POW's at Barth

Following the liberation of Stalag Luft1, on May the 13th 1945 at 0830 hours Flt Lt. Cowie was repatriated to Ford England in a B17 Flying Fortress (# 46308) Captained by 1st Lt. Pearson of the U.S. 8th Air Force. Flying time was 4 hours and 5 minutes.

Operation Revival was completed on 15 May 1945.

Identity Tag No
5169 issued to
Bruce Cowie at
Stalag Luft I



After rest and Recreation in England and Scotland, he returned to New Zealand in October 1945, the final leg being by Catalina flying boat (4055) Captained by Flight Lt. Tucker. The final leg departed Noumea at 0600 hours on October 17th and after a seven hour and ten minute flight landed at Mechanics Bay Auckland.

Since starting Pilot flying training at Wigram N.Z. on 9th February 1942, continuing with Navigation training on June 30 1942 in Prince Albert Saskatchewan, Canada, Flight Lieutenant Bruce Cowie logged 19.50 hours of pilot training and 352.15 hours of daylight and 81 hours of night flying. This was achieved in a total of twelve different types of aircraft.

Aircraft Flown

DH82 Tiger moth
Anson
Battle
Bolingbroke
Crane
Hudson
Wellington
Horsa (Glider)
Dakota
Oxford
B17 Flying Fortress
PBY Catalina